



BetterBuildings
Working with Utilities Peer Exchange Call: Kick-off
Call Slides and Discussion Summary

April 21, 2011

- What are peer exchange calls?
- Call logistics and attendance
- Key topics in working with utilities
- Grant project go-around:
 - What is the institutional relationship between your BB project and utilities?
 - What kind of utility are you working with (e.g., municipal, investor-owned, etc.)?
 - What are some key challenges or needs related to working with utilities?
 - Any successful strategies?
- Next steps
 - Future call topics, call frequency, format, etc.

Participating Grant Programs



- New Orleans
- Greater Cincinnati
- Chicago
- Kansas City
- Austin
- LA County
- Florida

- Data sharing
- On-bill financing
- Aligning workforce strategies and rules with utilities
- Aligning marketing and driving demand strategies with utilities
- Effective partnerships and joint strategies
- Utility role in long-range program sustainability

Discussion Summary: Challenges

- Utilities are risk averse, move slowly
- Regulations limit utilities ability to incur and/or pass on program-related costs
- Still some issues even with utility data sharing agreements: limits research access, data quality problems, release forms can be complicated for customers
- Utilities not well suited to the multi-family sector (there is often a “gap” between residential and commercial sector)
- Older, rigid utility billing mechanisms/infrastructure can be a barrier to on-bill payments

Discussion Summary: Strategies



- Patience is very important
- Data sharing agreements (Connecticut shared an example)
- Focus on building personal relationships (e.g., Maryland found it easier to build relationships with field personnel rather than headquarters)
- Show how BB programs can add value for utilities, such as helping them identify opportunities to deliver their programs (e.g., Maryland multi-family had success working with utilities on electronic thermostats and outdoor lighting)
- Some private utilities have investment capital that can be deployed if programs can demonstrate a good rate of return (e.g., around 8-9%)
- Leverage the contractor network and the relationship of the contractor network to utilities (Connecticut)
- Discuss risk management with utilities (Seattle/Portland)

Success Factors and Barriers for Working With Utilities

- What factors create an environment for successfully working with Utilities?
 - Enabling legislation, i.e., on-bill payments in OR were supported by legislation
 - Tariffs: MD, OR, and Seattle all allow utilities to collect tariffs for energy efficiency and/or renewables programs
 - Minimize costs to utilities, e.g., structure programs to allow utilities to pass through costs of on-bill payments to customers (fee based)
 - Programs act as “bridge” between utilities and developers; this can be as basic as simply ‘translating’ between parties and helping them understand where there are mutually beneficial partnerships
 - Risk management
 - Good relationships
- Barriers?
 - Billing software that makes it costly or infeasible to do on-bill payments
 - Rigid audit requirements that limit costs utilities can incur to support programs

Discussion Summary: Future Topics



- Examples of data sharing agreements—pros and cons
 - Examples and strategies for creating effective partnerships with utilities
 - Structuring programs to add value for utilities
 - Effective risk management strategies with utilities
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